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THE REAL ABYSSINIA

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CHAPTER IV

SOME OF THEIR HABITS AND CUSTOMS

197 Reference has already been made to the number of languages spoken in the country. Of these, the principal is Amharic, and of the Semitic languages of the world it is, according to Mr Armbruster, spoken by a greater number of people than any other, with the 212 exception of Arabic. Its difficulty may be gauged by the fact that there are over two hundred letters in the alphabet, and consequently the number of guides to the language guaranteed to teach it in half a dozen lessons by correspondence is limited.

I am bound to say, however, in mitigation of this apparently insurmountable barrier to learning Amharic, that these characters represent syllables and not letters, and are variations of about thirty-seven root characters.

197 The next most important language is Galla, a Hamitic tongue which is spoken and understood by all the different branches of Galla throughout the various districts inhabited by them; in addition Tigré is spoken in Eritrea, and Tigréin in the province of Tigré; both of these are Semitic languages, as is also the ancient Geze or Geuze tongue, which is to the Abyssinians much as Latin was to the English people in the Middle Ages.

805 But if their language is difficult their calendar is simpler than ours, for instead of having months of differing lengths, they divide the year into twelve

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months of thirty days each and a thirteenth month of five days, called Quagme, (or Pagme), adding a sixth day to Quagme in leap year.

Their year starts on the 1st day of Maskaram, which normally corresponds to our 11th September; it is on and from that day up to the end of our year seven years behind the European date; on and after the 1st January, until the 5th Quagme (our 10th September), it is eight years behind.

But in endeavouring to translate dates from Abyssinian to European computation bad snags await the unwary. In the first place the introduction of the 6th Quagme in their leap year throws all the dates between September and the following February back a day. The Abyssinian year following their leap year (which incidentally precedes ours!) begins on our 12th September instead of 11th September and continues a day behind time until our 29th February, when it is automatically readjusted. And if the translator wishes to compare dates prior to the present century he will find further joys in store for him. For the Abyssinians have counted as leap years the three years we do not (though they are properly leap years), viz.: 1700, 1800, and 1900. Nor do they take account of the additional day we dropped in 1800, nor, I think, of the ten days omitted from our calendar in 1582. So they gradually picked up fourteen days out of the seven (or eight) years that they were (and are) behind. This probably explains why their year starts on 11th September instead of 29th August, as in the case of most Eastern nations.

The difference in the number of years between their computation and ours is possibly due (i) to their

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805 adoption of the Alexandrian era recognizing 5500 years from the creation to the birth of Christ, which was placed three years *before* that given by the Dionysian era (*i.e.* 5502 B.C. 29th August); and (ii) to their adoption of the Diocletian era, which dropped ten years out of the calendar in A.D. 284. Thus they lost ten years and gained three or two according to the date to be computed.

A similar result would have been attained had they adopted, in lieu of the above, the calculation made by the Egyptian monk Ponodorus who (*circa* A.D. 400) struck ten years off the age of the world and placed the Incarnation three years after the then accepted date, thus forming the "mundane era of Antioch" which was adopted by the Christians of Syria. It is possible that this was the era adopted by the Abyssinians; it is so stated to be in some of their old manuscripts.

Abyssinian				European	
A.M.	A.D.	Month	Days	Months and Days	A.D.
7427	1927	Maskaram	1st to 30th	11 Sept. to 10 Oct.	1934
"	"	Tekemt	"	11 Oct. " 9 Nov.	"
"	"	Hidar	"	10 Nov. " 9 Dec.	"
"	"	Tasas	"	10 Dec. " 8 Jan.	1935
"	"	Tirr	"	9 Jan. " 7 Feb.	"
"	"	Yakatit	"	8 Feb. " 9 March	"
"	"	Magabit	"	10 March " 8 April	"
"	"	Mazya	"	9 April " 8 May	"
"	"	Gimbot	"	9 May " 7 June	"
"	"	Sane	"	8 June " 7 July	"
"	"	Hamle	"	8 July " 6 Aug.	"
"	"	Nahasse	"	7 Aug. " 5 Sept.	"
"	"	Quagme	1st to 6th	6 Sept. " 11 Sept.	"
7428	1928	Maskaram	1st to 30th	12 Sept. " 11 Oct.	"
"	"	Tekemt	"	12 Oct. " 10 Nov.	"
"	"	Hidar	"	11 Nov. " 10 Dec.	"
"	"	Tasas	"	11 Dec. " 9 Jan.	1936
"	"	Tirr	"	10 Jan. " 8 Feb.	"
"	"	Yakatit	"	9 Feb. " 9 March	"

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The Abyssinian calendar for *their* current year (leap year for them) accordingly compares with ours as shewn on the previous page; and in the last month given, the calendar resumes its normal correspondence with ours as, owing to the occurrence of our leap year, February has an extra day in 1936.

Apart from their language, there are many customs and practices amongst the Abyssinians which differentiate them sharply from most of the other peoples of Africa, and not the least interesting of these are clearly traceable to their ancient connection with Israel, of which they speak with pride in their old records.

For example, much of their religious pageantry, which is described in detail elsewhere, is undoubtedly a remarkable survival of rites which must have been introduced by the earliest Jewish arrivals, such as the Dance of the Priests, their ceremonies connected with the Tabot, and many others. Similarly, their method of slaughtering cattle for food, the division of animals into clean and unclean, etc., are all indications pointing in the same direction.

Their dislike of Jews to-day is accordingly the more remarkable, and must be due to the sanguinary wars which took place from the fourth to the tenth centuries between the newly-converted Christians and those who remained Jews.

Among other customs which are peculiar and interesting, pride of place must surely be given to their fondness for raw meat or *broundo*. This form of diet is preferred to any other by the mass of the population, and indeed by practically all sections thereof, beef being liked better than mutton.

When we were on trek our men could be given no

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262 greater treat than an ox, and within an hour of the purchase of the animal it was killed, skinned, cut into joints and divided amongst the tents, and our followers were busy gorging themselves on the still warm flesh.

[25] What the twenty men could not eat in the day was
136 never cooked, but was cut into long thin strips and hung on ropes to dry in the sun and wind for the morrow's meal—a tempting bait for the vultures, hawks, and carrion crows that used to collect in their hundreds and make frantic dives for the tempting morsels, occasionally picking up a piece from the line in their claws to the intense disgust of the men. It was fascinating to watch the daring swoops and dips of the circling birds, and so reckless did they become that one day whilst we were at lunch a hawk, baulked of his craving for raw meat by the watchfulness of its guardians, actually swooped down on our luncheon table and snatched from the plate on my wife's knees the wing of a duck that she was about to operate on, brushing her face and knocking her knife out of her hand with his powerful wings; and at the same moment another bird lifted a cutlet from a dish which our "boy" was carrying from the cook's tent to our table. The "boy's" expression of indignation and helplessness was most comical to watch.

262 But to revert to the practice of eating raw meat. Early travellers to Abyssinia have not only commented on this, but have gone even further, and have stated that meat is cut and eaten *from the living animal.* Bruce describes two separate and distinct instances of this practice, which he stated occurred frequently. The first was that of three soldiers whom he saw driving along a cow, and on arriving at a halting-place they tied it,

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threw it down, cut steaks from it which they devoured rapidly, and then drove the cow on again, plastering up the wound with mud. The second (which is given with a wealth of detail too revolting to repeat) was at a regular banquet at which a live cow was brought in and strips cut from it by all the guests until the animal died, which took some time.

Salt states that Pearce actually saw an example of the first instance quoted above, which he says is by no means uncommon, but he disbelieves the second instance. No other writer that I am acquainted with recounts any such instance *of his own knowledge*, and the suggestion that such a practice ever existed is hotly denied in the country. Nor could I find any evidence of the existence of such a habit either as to the present or the past. Personally I am inclined to disbelieve the stories or to regard them as gross exaggerations, or possibly as isolated instances.

Be that as it may, the raw meat dietary, however, is undoubtedly very popular to-day, and it may be of interest if I give an extract from my diary describing a great *Gebur*, or banquet given at the Feast of Maskal, which we attended, and at which no fewer than 15,000 soldiers and 2000 or 3000 palace retainers were fed in four relays in the great hall. This is the more interesting in that for some years past Europeans have not been admitted to the *Gebur*, and although one was held on our last visit we were not present.

The *Gebur*

"We were received by the Court Chamberlain on the large stone terrace outside the *aderatch*, and after a

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574 short interval led through rooms wrapped in darkness
264 to the banqueting hall, at one end of which was a large raised platform shut in by closely drawn white curtains. Here, seated on a dais, was the Empress, surrounded by Abyssinian notables, and after paying our respects to Her Majesty, Ras Tafari, and others, we were conducted to the table prepared for Europeans on one side of the platform—there were about fifteen of us. At the opposite side of the platform the Ras and the principal chiefs sat down at another table, whilst in the middle green silk curtains were drawn round the Empress' dais, so that she should be hidden from the vulgar eye whilst eating; a constant stream of attendants bearing every conceivable kind of receptacle, from beautifully wrought gold dishes to enamelled iron mugs, passed in and out of her little tent.

"After we had had an excellent, if somewhat lengthy, meal, consisting of a mixed assortment of European and Abyssinian courses, the white curtains by which the platform was shut in were pulled back, shewing the hall packed with long low tables as closely as they could be got in, the tables being covered with slabs of Abyssinian bread enclosing quantities of cooked cut-up meat.

"To the sound of bugles and trumpets the main doors were opened and in poured the chiefs with their soldiery, who had come up to Addis Ababa for the feast from all over the country; the organization was admirable, and though some 5000 men filled the hall there was no sort of scrambling or disorder whatever.

"They set to work at once on the *hors-d'œuvres*, and then the *pièces de résistance* arrived. Hundreds of pairs of men came in, each pair carrying between them a long

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stout pole, from which hung huge pieces of red raw meat, covered with strips of red and gold cloth.

"These men stood closely together all along the tables and one on each side, so that the meat hung down from the poles over the tables just in front of the diners. The guests produced knives, and feeling the joint with their fingers to pick out a tender bit, rapidly sliced off strips of meat, which they put into their mouths, cutting off what would not go in quite close to their lips, an operation which, from personal experience, I know demands great skill if one's nose is not to suffer—as the cut is always made upwards.

"After ample libations of *tej* and *araki* (native mead, or hydromel and spirit) the diners filed out in perfect order, and the stage was cleared for the next party.

"The whole function had lasted nearly four hours and the Ras must have been heartily glad when it was over, for he had previously dined one instalment of 5000 warriors, and two more were to follow—between 17,000 and 18,000 in all partaking of the royal hospitality."

Broundo may be a nourishing form of diet tending to the development of warlike qualities, but its consumption has one serious drawback at all events, in that it is the cause of taenia (or tapeworm), a disease which is almost universal in the country. So much is this the case indeed that it is a recognized practice for all, high and low, to take monthly as a "taenicide" a dose of a plant known as *kousso*, which is so violent in its effects as to incapacitate the patient from work or occupation for the day.

Christians will not touch meat unless it is killed by

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Christians will not touch meat unless it is killed by
784 one of themselves, nor will Moslems eat any which has
795 been killed by a Christian. We had one Moslem with us when we were on trek, and as he would not eat the ox which my other men had killed he bought a whole sheep for himself, and killed and ate it himself; none of the other men would touch an atom of it, even when their own supply ran out and they had no meat at all.

262 Of course the comparatively high price of meat (for
252 an Abyssinian) prevents the too frequent consumption of *broundo* amongst the people, and their tastes in everyday food are simple. Bread is their mainstay. This is found in many varieties; some of it soft, slightly sour in taste, and pale brown in colour; the most popular is of flour made from *teff* or millet seed, mixed to a thick paste with water and then poured into a large rough slightly concave iron receptacle and cooked over an open fire, without grease or fat of any kind. When finished this bread takes the form and aspect of large pancakes, twelve to eighteen inches in diameter, and is very good, especially when eaten with jam or butter; we always ate it ourselves when on trek. The native eats with it a kind of mash of lentils or dried peas, ground and cooked, and mixed with butter and a very hot red sauce which is produced from the chilli; this latter is very widely cultivated in several varieties all over the country.

263 The amount of pepper that is put into their cooked dishes is as a rule disastrous to the European palate at the first time of trying, and how they can swallow the fiery compounds that they do passes my comprehension —their tongues and palates must be made of leather.

264 All food, including meat, is eaten with the fingers amongst all classes, a piece of bread being broken off,

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wrapped round the portion of other foodstuff to be eaten, and the whole put bodily into the mouth.

I happened on one occasion to call on an Abyssinian chieftain, a ruler of a distant province who was visiting Addis and who was a particular friend of mine, just as he was sitting down to a late lunch in his *tukul* surrounded by his principal vassal chiefs. I had to sit down on the divan next to him; and as he was of course eating *à l'Abyssine* his cook kept on rolling up succulent morsels of terrifically hot curry or stewed meat or raw flesh in bread with his fingers, and pressing them on my jaded palate. Any of his chiefs whom he desired to honour was similarly distinguished, that is to say, he would select a tit-bit, give it to the cook who doctored it up and passed it to a slave, who conveyed it to the fortunate recipient, who ate it with great gusto. And fingers all round all the time!

Except for some few individuals who have acquired the habit in Europe or from Europeans, smoking, curiously enough, is practically non-existent among Abyssinians although the tobacco plant grows freely, and the Gallas make a sort of rough coarse tobacco which is possible, though hardly pleasant. The practice was somewhat drastically discouraged by the late Emperor Johannes (Theodore's successor), who is said to have punished smoking by cutting off the offender's lips, and snuffing by removing his nose. I was unsuccessful in ascertaining the cause of their objection to smoking, one of the various obviously inadequate reasons being that the use of tobacco was condemned because the plant was supposed to have grown originally out of the tomb of the heretic Arius! A more probable explanation is that the practice was regarded as a

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276 Moslem one and was accordingly originally condemned by the Church.

On the other hand they make up for this privation
273 by a pretty free indulgence in their own home-made hydromel (*tej*), beer (*talla*), and spirits (*araki*), and also in fearsome alcoholic preparations distilled by some of the small Greek traders in Addis.

Tej, their principal drink, is home-made by nearly every family; this is manufactured from honey, which is to be found in great quantities in most parts of Abyssinia, and is fermented by means of an evergreen plant called *guecho* or *geshu*. When well made and matured it is a very pleasant beverage; to the native it is an intoxicant, and during the feast days one meets many who have partaken well but not too wisely of it.

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CHAPTER V

SOME OF THEIR HABITS & CUSTOMS—(*continued*)

As the people are Christians they are of course monogamists, but though they have only one wife at a time, they often have, unfortunately for the race, many wives one after the other, and as a natural corollary the women have a series of husbands. This is due to their appallingly lax marriage laws and to the ridiculous facilities for divorce, advantages which do not apply to the Gallas, who "enjoy" two or three or more wives at a time, but then they are not Christians.

Marriage amongst the Abyssinians exists in three forms. Firstly, the man selects a bride, and without any form of ceremony they live together, he supplying her with small amounts of money in addition to a home and the necessaries of life, and when either of them so desires they come to a mutual agreement and separate as easily as they united.

Secondly, there is the civil marriage. In this case there is a contract made before the *Shum* (or "Mayor") when the properties of the would-be bride and bridegroom are specified, and an arrangement is made as to division in case of divorce, though usually they agree to divide things equally. In the event of divorce this division is carried out to the letter, and should there, for example, be amongst other things only one cooking pot, this is halved. When a woman has been "married"

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583 and divorced in this manner two or three times she is
586 considered rather a "catch", on account perhaps of her worldly possessions which she has acquired from her previous matrimonial ventures. Then if she does not retire from the world and become a kind of nun she often indulges in the third form of marriage, a solemn religious ceremony which is really binding; it is as a general rule confined to the better class of Abyssinians.

562 Women, some of whom are attractive and even pretty, have, speaking generally, little or no position. There are of course exceptions to this rule, and I have known cases where a wife has by her influence over her husband acquired a certain status for herself. But this is rare, and by a general though not universal rule women are even supposed to eat separately.

562 Nevertheless the higher-class woman manages to
586 hold her own, and if badly treated by her husband has the right of appeal to the Church. And so far as I can gather the woman of any class can divorce her husband as easily as he can divorce her, which gives her a certain protection in itself.

562 In spite of the facility of divorce—possibly to some extent because of the mutual power to exercise it—the
462 lot of women is not at all what one might expect; they
357 are by no means the hewers of wood and drawers of water that one finds so extensively in Africa. They do little or no work, neither washing nor mending their husbands' clothes nor cooking; all this is done by Gourages or others of whom one or more is to be found in almost every household—other than the very poorest —and even amongst one's own servants, acting as "gentlemen's gentlemen".

562 Women of the upper classes are still to some ex-

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tent secluded and when they go out they ride mules astride, are completely veiled or rather covered up in their *chammas* and are accompanied by an escort on foot, one or two of whom walk or trot by the side of the mule holding the lady in position.

Getting on to the mule is an operation that must by no means be witnessed by the profane masculine eye; I remember on the occasion of the first visit paid to my wife by an Abyssinian lady of rank I went to the entrance to speed the parting guest. To my surprise a number of members of the escort took off their *chammas* and held them all round the mule so that their mistress could climb into her saddle in complete seclusion.

But rigid as may be the rules of privacy governing the lives of women, there are no harems, and no guard of eunuchs to watch over them as in Moslem countries.

Nevertheless other Eastern customs are practised, such as circumcision among men and a mild form of clitoridectomy among women; this custom, be it observed, is not as is often supposed of Jewish origin, but probably of much more remote antiquity, and is further evidence of the Hamitic descent of the Abyssinians; according to Gibbon circumcision had been practised "by the most ancient Ethiopians, from motives of health and cleanliness" and presumably not therefore as a religious rite.

The nation as a whole has not adopted European dress, although it is worn to some extent in Addis Ababa, and by individuals who have been to Europe. They are proud of their national dress and the Emperor still encourages its use at court functions and receptions at the palace.

The distinctive feature of the dress is the *chamma*,

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291 which is worn by both men and women of all ranks; and by the beauty of the *chamma* can as a rule be judged the position or state of purse of the wearer. It consists of a piece of material about three yards in length and from two to four yards in width according as to whether it is doubled or not.

291 286 The more beautiful specimens of these are hand-woven from native cotton, spun and prepared by the Abyssinian women. These are usually edged with red or mixed coloured silks, and those worn by the high priests, great chiefs, and princes and princesses have a very handsome border varying from twelve to eighteen inches wide, carried out in silks of vivid colours woven into an artistic design. They are as fine as gossamer, though large and warm; they are not as a rule sold, but if ever obtainable by Europeans cost from 200 to 500 dollars.

The more ordinary *chammas* are also woven by hand, but of imported cotton, and by comparison are of a much harder and coarser character, though still nice to look at. Natives who cannot afford the hand-woven shawl make use of a length of *abougedid* or cotton sheeting for the same purpose.

291 The *chamma*, which is not unlike the old Roman toga, is draped round the shoulders, often being brought up over the head to the eyebrow and again over the lower part of the face and nose, leaving but the eyes [576] visible. It is always lowered from the face and head as a mark of friendliness or respect, and generally when passing Europeans, though I have known Abyssinians of the anti-foreign old régime to cover up their faces more closely when passing the *Frangi*. At court those in attendance twist the garment round the waist and

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throw the end over the right shoulder from back to front. As a general rule, however, women turn them up on the left shoulder, whilst men free their right arm and shoulder. They make, floating in the breeze, a very picturesque addition to the costume of the wearers. 291

Very little difference is apparent in the dress of the Ethiopian men and women of any class. This is made of imported white cotton materials of varying design and quality, and consists of roomy trousers tied round the waist and tightened in from calf to ankle, and a loose shirt reaching below the knee. The latter is worn longer by the women, with some coloured silk embroidery round neck and cuffs; this embroidery is also carried out round the bottom of the trousers, which are tightly fastened at the ankle with tiny silver or gold buttons. The shirts of both men and women have very close-fitting sleeves from elbow to wrist, which are also buttoned, the men's shirts being finished with high tight neck-bands which give them a clean, smart appearance.

Sometimes I have seen, though rarely, the shirt and trousers, and even the *chamma*, worn in pink or blue or even yellow. This is a sign of mourning—white is otherwise the universal rule. [765]

Most Abyssinians wear a head-covering of sorts. In the case of the people this generally consists of a piece of white muslin twisted round or tied over the head; I have also, though rarely, seen them wearing straw hats of native manufacture, and, still more rarely, a sort of brown woollen cap with a tuft, not unlike a fez in shape. The better-class Abyssinian, of both sexes, sometimes affects a wide-brimmed soft grey or black felt hat of European manufacture.

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291 The Abyssinian lady and gentleman are frequently to be seen with a black satin three-quarter mantle, ornamented by a little gold braid round the neck and generally a coloured silk lining. In the rainy season a black woollen-hooded cape or *burnous* is donned by all classes, women wearing the hood at the back, and men sporting theirs on their left shoulder. The *burnous* is also a sign of mourning, for which purpose people of every class wear it.

765 515 296 A further, and less pleasant, sign of mourning is for the bereaved one to refrain from washing his clothes; but I only observed this practice in connection with servants and persons of humble position. Ordinarily they are very keen on washing their white garments, and even on trek there was a great "clean-up" whenever we stayed in camp for an extra twenty-four hours. The day before our return into Addis was always the occasion for the most lavish use of soap and water, and the *safari* on arrival looked really quite smart, the men all having donned spotless white *chammas*, shirt, and trousers for the occasion, when, I am bound to say, they looked externally a good deal cleaner than our travel-stained garments allowed us to do.

293 A cartridge belt of various colours and designs, from the plain native leather to the gold and silk embroidered specimen, is more or less generally worn by the men, and its value is also often an indication to the position or means of the wearer. In its place women use a girdle of some sort, to which is attached their keys, ear-cleaners, head-scratchers, and small silver ornaments. Parasols of neatly plaited grass, intermixed with coloured cottons, are carried frequently by both sexes in all seasons. These are quite picturesque, and no doubt serve their

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main purpose, but of course they cannot be closed up. 293
Ordinary umbrellas are never used by the Abyssinians, though huge and brilliant coloured umbrellas are used by priests and other important personages on ceremonial occasions.

On feast days the chiefs and other functionaries at 292
Court change their cotton shirt for one of silk or satin, gorgeously embroidered in gold and silver, and in various colours. And finally a pelerine of bright-coloured cloth of velvet, or, better still, of lion or black leopard skin ornamented in silver and silver-gilt, is permitted to be worn by those only whom it is desired to distinguish on account of specially meritorious conduct, generally in war.

The full-dress costume of a Ras or Dejazmach, with 293
bristling lion's mane head-dress, velvet cape with lion's mane collar, embroidered in gold and silver-gilt, and gala shield and sword-scabbard covered with velvet and embossed with silver-gilt ornamentation, is a really magnificent one, and the appearance of Dejazmach Nado, the envoy to King George in 1919, at Buckingham Palace in this dress caused quite a sensation.

Mention must also be made of one article which is 301
an indispensable adjunct to the dress of every Christian 778
Abyssinian, and that is the *matab*, a silken cord carrying an amulet or charm, which is worn round the neck as the badge of their faith.

The gentler sex affect as much jewellery of all sorts, 301
bracelets, rings, anklets, necklaces, earrings, etc., as they are able to procure; these are of native make as already described. As a general rule they have extraordinarily small *attaches*, and of all the native bracelets that we collected in and round Addis Ababa none

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301 would meet round the wrist of any of our English friends.

302 The fashion amongst the women of wearing the hair, which is jet black, varies, and sometimes it is left about two or three inches long, curling and waving, thus forming a becoming frame to the face. More common, perhaps, is the style of doing up the hair into dozens of tiny plaits taking the form of the head, the ends being loosely tied together on the neck and left to hang; some affect a parting down the middle of their heads, puff the hair out at the sides, and do it up in a chignon at the back like many Europeans. Amongst the lowest classes one finds perhaps most frequently in both sexes the head shaved, the hair being allowed to grow till uncomfortable and then shaved again. This shaving appears to us a somewhat painful process, and to be an apt illustration of the dictum that *il faut souffrir pour être beau*; for one frequently sees the operation in progress, two forms squatting on the ground, one shaving the other with a bit of broken glass-bottle.

Children as a general rule also have their heads shaved, but a tuft of hair is often left on the crown of the head, or a fringe round their forehead, and young boys frequently have the head bare except for a strip of hair extending from the back of the neck to the forehead over the centre of the head, which gives the appearance of a cock's comb and is most comical.

The Abyssinians of the people are also addicted to buttering their heads, of which unpleasant (though fortunately not universal) practice I have been given three explanations. The first is that it is done for purposes of adornment, which is understandable; the

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habit is not confined to Abyssinia! The second, which is more curious, is that of protection against the sun's rays. In this connection it is interesting to recall that Mr Mansfield Parkyns, who spent three years in Abyssinia, used no head covering of any sort at any time other than a coating of butter, which he says he found as effective as any hat.

The third (and most frivolous) reason is that butter in the hair hampers the free movement (and consequent irritation) of the little creatures that live there. There is possibly something in this, as a "head-scratcher", in the form of a blunt silver or wooden pin, is a general ornament, as incidentally is also an "ear-cleaner" which resembles a small salt-spoon.

In some parts of the country where the hairdressing mode is of an elaborate character, the women, when lying down to sleep, use wooden head-rests for their necks, made of a slightly curved piece of wood supported on a sort of foot, the whole being a few inches high. Some of these are quite elaborately carved or coloured; but however pleasing they may be to the eye—and I have seen some very pretty ones—they must make exceedingly uncomfortable pillows, and the use of them appears to argue an even greater interest in personal appearance than European women display. These head-rests are of very ancient origin; they are curiously similar to the one discovered in Tutankhamen's tomb.

The more wealthy Abyssinians are very partial to scents and scented hair oils; the strength of the scent is more important to them than its quality, and the shops in Addis Ababa do a brisk trade in inferior

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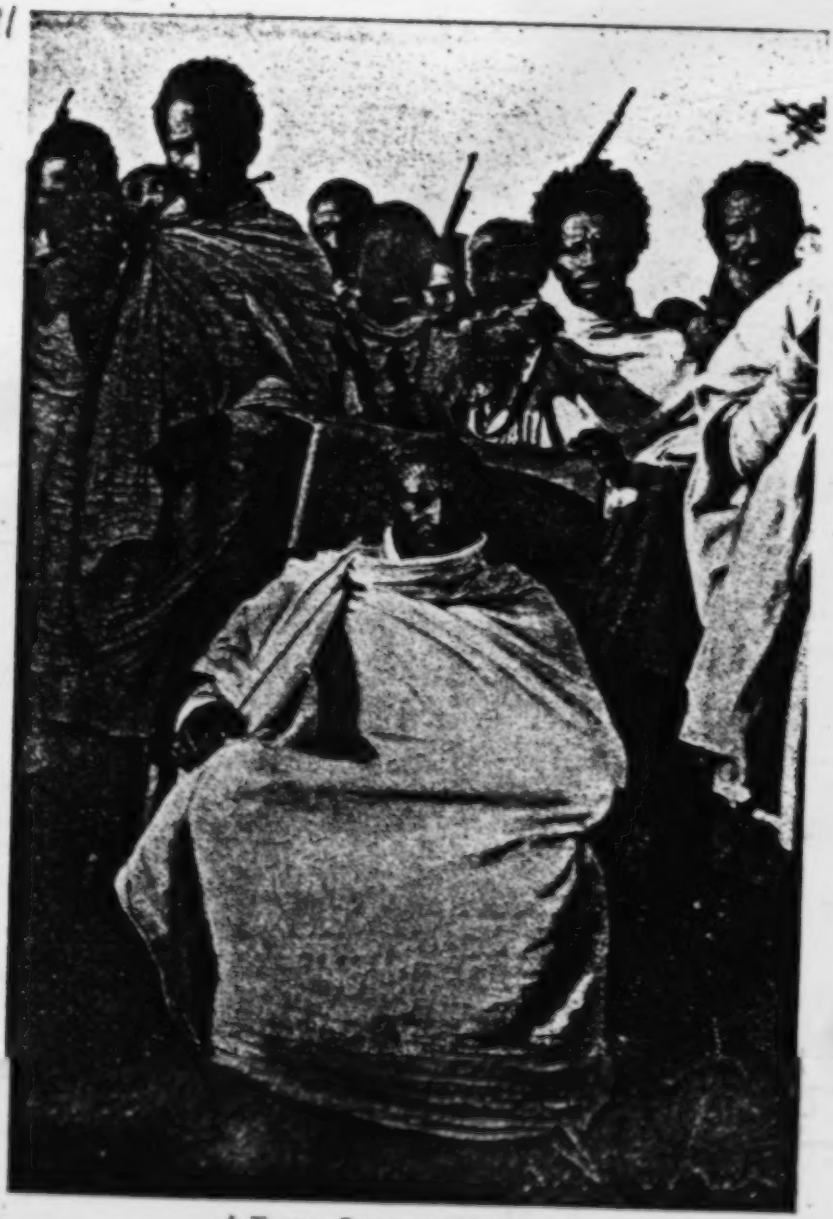

A Typical Provincial Governor.

This Provincial Governor is wearing the National Dress known as the "Chamma."

[facing p. 78]

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302 imported toilet requisites of this kind, and charge fabulous prices for them.

The curious custom of stopping up the nostrils is still met with, though I imagine it is becoming less and less common; but one still constantly sees natives on their way to market with a piece of green leaf, or a flower petal, protruding from their noses, and I remember on one occasion when an Abyssinian lady, who had been paying us a visit, was leaving the house, she produced some cotton-wool and stuffed it carefully in both nostrils.

181 Their love of pageantry, display, and functions is quite Oriental, and is well exemplified by the splendour of some of their religious and Court ceremonies.

521 Amusements are few. The people seem to prefer to sit and chatter; they are great talkers, and whether in the servants' quarters in a house or round their fires on trek, one hears the clatter of their tongues almost incessantly.

492 All Abyssinians can ride more or less, and they are on the whole good horsemen, though indifferent horse-masters. Except in war, or on the occasion of a fantasia, they seldom ride horses; for purposes of daily use mules are almost universally preferred; all but the poorest women also ride mules for getting about.

The Abyssinian saddle is of wood with a pommel back and front and a sheepskin and some padding in the middle, the whole covered with a brightly embroidered saddle-cloth. The stirrups are round and very small, as the Abyssinian inserts only his big toe therein. The bits are horrible instruments, consisting of a ring round the lower jaw and a spike which, when the reins are pulled, sticks into the roof of the animal's

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492 mouth and causes it to bleed freely; in spite of, or perhaps because of this, I never came across an Abyssinian pony with a hard mouth; indeed, they can nearly all be ridden on a snaffle.

Their mules are so covered with many-hued trappings that sometimes they leave very little of the beast to be seen. These trappings are made of several thicknesses of native-dyed coloured leathers sewn together, machine-embroidered in silks of many colours, and covered with metal ornaments.

On special occasions the Abyssinians of rank cover their mules with extra gorgeous drapings in vivid colourings of velvet or silk, decorated with handsome embossed silver or silver-gilt ornaments. The men themselves on these occasions bring out their best sword and buckler, the latter being made of stretched and shaped rhino hide, covered with velvet and ornamented with silver and gilt mountings.

342 The houses of the wealthier people are constructed of stone (of which ample supplies are available almost everywhere), plastered together with a sort of mortar called *chika*, mostly mud and water; the roof is either of corrugated iron or is thatched. They are as a rule one-storied buildings, though I have been in one or two that had an upper story surrounded by a verandah and reached by an outside staircase, but these have generally been acquired from Greeks. In these cases [231] the ground floor is frequently used as stabling for the mules and ponies (even amongst Greeks and Armenians), a state of affairs which can hardly be regarded as sanitary.

513 In the peasants' *tukuls* in the country, men, women, and children, mules, ponies, and other animals sleep

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513 all together in their single room; if to the aroma arising from this combined population be added the acrid [372] smoke from a fire made of dung-cakes, and a plentiful accompaniment of fleas and other insects, the joys of a night's shelter in such quarters may well be imagined.

351 The house nearly always stands in a very large piece of ground surrounded by a mud and stone wall. It is a curious habit of theirs that in building the wall they generally start with the gateway. Occasionally, for one reason or another, the wall-building suffers a hitch, and one sees the quaint spectacle of a gateway (sometimes with a gate), a few yards of wall, and then nothing to impede general ingress. Some of the chiefs, 342 however, are now building themselves better places, especially those that have been on missions to Europe. But even among these an ordinary *tukul* sometimes suffices, and most of the important chiefs I met in Abyssinia were content with most primitive installations.

The *tukuls* of the poorer class are mostly constructed in a circular form of sticks plastered inside and out with mud. The roof, which is made separately and put on last, is cone-shaped, made of sticks or cane bound strongly together with strips of bark and then thatched: the latter is an art in which the Abyssinians particularly excel. The roof extends two or three feet from the walls; thus the torrential rains run off easily and leave the hut perfectly dry.

342 Inside, a part is usually divided off by a length of 352 sheeting suspended on a string, behind which, on a raised platform, the family sleep on couches or beds made of wood and grass and covered with skins; blankets are uncommon, and the *chammas* in which

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they are rolled form their only covering apart from the clothes which have been worn during the day. The remaining part of the hut is used for everything—living, cooking, eating, and also spinning in the rainy season—but of course in the dry weather much work is done outside. Apart from one or two rough wooden stools, furniture is rare or non-existent in these huts. In most of them, however, there are one or more wooden packing-cases containing the owners' most precious possessions, and fastened with a padlock and key; the remainder of their worldly goods are hung on hooks or put in niches in the walls. A form of basket-table is used at meal-times as both dish and plate, and drinking-cups made of horn are still to be seen in the provinces, though imported cups are now fairly common in Addis. A draught of mead from a cow's horn a couple of feet long is delightfully reminiscent of the pictures of the Danish and Norse invaders of England in the distant past.

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CHAPTER XV

THE NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

11/ Few institutions of a religious character could be more picturesque than the National Church of Abyssinia, but when that has been said little more can be advanced in its favour. It has been alleged by a recent visitor to the country that "Ethiopian Christianity is of a kind which Dean Stanley described as hardly capable of going lower without ceasing to be Christianity", and I am not prepared to quarrel with the statement.

Yet, such as it is, it is exceedingly rich and powerful and its influence is still very strong to-day; and great as is the part played by various forms of religious belief in shaping the destinies of many countries in the world, few I think can have affected a country's history as much as in Abyssinia.

There is little doubt but that that country owes the maintenance of its position of independence for so long largely to the fact that, one of the first of the peoples of Africa to embrace Christianity, it has maintained a form of that faith for nearly 1600 years. This fact added to the impregnable nature of its mountain fastnesses, and the warlike character of its people, has caused the country to be regarded somewhat differently to the bulk of the nations of Africa, and has contributed to its escape up till now from the fate of partition amongst European powers which has overtaken the rest of the continent.

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That the whole fabric of the original tenets of their Church is overlaid with a mass of gross superstition is unfortunately only too obvious; it is due, doubtless, to the vicissitudes through which the Church has passed, to the perpetual and invincible ignorance of the bulk of the priesthood, and to the composite nature of their Church tradition, consisting, as it does, of a pagan, Egyptian, Jewish, Coptic, and Latin evolution. That elements of all these forms of worship enter into their present-day religion cannot be doubted by those who have witnessed their ceremonies, examined their ecclesiastical robes and furniture, and studied their customs. And, indeed, it would be strange if it were not so, for this ancient people are themselves a combination of a number of different strains and races, drawn from both Asia and Africa, combining to form not only an interesting historical study, but a curious and baffling modern problem in the world of to-day, into which they have only comparatively recently emerged.

Originally pagan of course, the country adopted Judaism nearly 1000 B.C., and about the time of the birth of Christ the mythological beliefs of Greece appear to have been introduced, without, however, effecting the supersession of the Jewish faith.

It was in the early part of the fourth century (A.D. 330 is the generally accepted date) that the conversion of Ethiopia from Judaism to Christianity is reported to have been effected as the result of the visit to that country of some shipwrecked Christians. Being successful in converting the sovereign and the Court, they aspired to extend their sway over the whole country, and accordingly one of them returned to Egypt, obtained the assistance of the Alexandrian authorities, was

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771

nominated Bishop of Ethiopia, and induced the Abyssinian people to join the Alexandrian or Coptic branch of the Church.

According to Abyssinian tradition the first introduction of Christianity took place at an even earlier date. It is alleged that Matthew the Evangelist visited the northern districts of the country about A.D. 30 and attempted the conversion of the people; apparently, however, he made only few converts to the new doctrines and was eventually turned out. A further slight extension of the new faith is claimed to have been made a few years later; indeed Alvarez, writing in 1527, refers to Ethiopian books and traditions which describe Candace as the first Christian queen of the country and as having had her principal residence near Axum. Her conversion was alleged to have been due to a eunuch in her service who was sent by her to Jerusalem, and there met with Philip and was baptized by him as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. This would be about A.D. 34, or some three hundred years before the generally accepted date.

I do not propose to enter into the merits of this latter claim, nor even into the claim that Abyssinia became christianized by divine inspiration during Christ's childhood without the aid of any missionaries (!); nor is it my purpose to trace the history of the Church from its inception up to now. Suffice it to say that it has passed through many vicissitudes, and that for hundreds of years the Abyssinians had to fight for the maintenance of their religion against external and internal foes. The main attacks were the great Moslem invasion of 1528 which swept over the country and all but engulfed it, followed by the invasion of the pagan

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Galla, which came very near to being successful and which would in that event have resulted in blotting out Christianity in the country. And finally, the third attack on their particular form of Christianity, though not on Christianity itself, came from the Portuguese missionaries, who, arriving towards the middle of the sixteenth century, produced a good deal of effect on the religious life of the country. They actually succeeded in inducing one king to renounce the Alexandrian doctrine, to profess publicly his belief in Roman Catholicism, and to proclaim this faith as the national religion. But the success was short-lived; public opinion, bitterly outraged, would not tolerate the supersession of the old doctrines, and the king was compelled to restore the national faith by public proclamation. His son, who succeeded him shortly afterwards, completed the work by expelling the Jesuits.

In spite of these attacks the Abyssinians retain their faith unaltered to this day, though owing to their later conquests their rule extends over a larger number of non-Christian subjects than there are Abyssinians. The Somals, Danakil, and some of the Galla (in Harrar and Djimma) are Moslems; the Shankala and other Galla (in Boran, Arussi and Walega) are pagan, the latter believing in a form of supreme deity they call *Wak* or *Wakwe*, and a number of minor spirits or *Sarosh*. The Falasha are Jews.

Many of the Galla (in Wollo for example) were converted to Christianity by the Emperor Menelik, but his methods hardly seem to have been such as to inspire the converts with any profound or reasoned conviction of the merits of that faith. When he conquered a Galla country the inhabitants had to become Christians lest

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175 worse should befall them, and the process was rapid and
771 simple—immersion in the nearest stream, circumcision, and generally the tying of a piece of blue silk cord round the neck.

779 The form of Christianity professed by Abyssinia is the monophysite, which was condemned as a "heresy" by the Council of Chalcedon in 450. This doctrine recognizes only one nature in Christ, against the view which has maintained itself as orthodox that the divine and human natures co-existed in him. But in spite of the thunders of Chalcedon the Abyssinians have held to their doctrine, although controversies as to a single, dual, and even threefold nature have raged in the country right up to the time of Theodore, who possessed decided views on the subject, and exercised drastic methods in giving effect to them.

793 The Church is to all intents and purposes an independent one, its only link with the Coptic Church in Egypt, on which it is nominally dependent, being the appointment by Alexandria of the Archbishop, or Abouna: he is an Egyptian, and once appointed he is supposed never to leave the country.

Tradition relates that the appointment of a foreign Abouna was laid down as a cardinal principle by the great Abyssinian ecclesiastic and national saint, Tekla Haimanot, in the thirteenth century in order to maintain connection between Abyssinia and the outside world, and to avoid internal rivalry in the nomination to the headship of the Church. Be that as it may, the Abyssinians attach considerable importance to their connection with the Alexandrian Church through their Abouna; this may be gauged from the fact that the Treaty between England, Egypt, and Abyssinia, made

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by Admiral Sir William Hewett with King John in 1884, expressly provides that "H.H. the Khedive engages to grant all the facilities which H.M. the Negusa Negus may require in the matter of appointing Abounas for Ethiopia". 783

His is the power to crown kings, and no priest can be ordained without him. He officiates at all the big religious festivals, and his influence in the councils of state is reported to be considerable.

Mr Winwood Reade, in his book *The Martyrdom of Man*, states that "by way of blessing he (the Abouna) spits upon his congregation, who believe that the episcopal virtue resides in the saliva and not as we think in the finger-ends". I am bound to say we never saw or heard of this particular form of benediction while we were there, but even if it were so, it would not be so very surprising in view of the fact that, as everyone knows, at the baptism of children Roman Catholic priests to this day moisten their thumbs with their saliva and touch the child's nostrils therewith when they are baptizing it. 788

Up to the time of King Abreha, when the conversion of the country to Christianity took place, the head of the then existing religion was in accordance with Mosaic practice the High Priest. The nomination of a Bishop or Abouna followed, and functions were divided between the two, the Abouna being regarded as the chief in matters of religion proper, settling all questions of dogma and theology, whilst the High Priest controlled the Church staff and property. A further functionary known as the *Itcheque* was created in the thirteenth century, and duties were divided amongst these three up to the time of the Emperor 793

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793 Menelik, who made the Abouna supreme head of all matters; the *Itcheque* second with residence at the great national monastery of Debra Libanos; and the High Priest third in the hierarchy.

794 793 792 The wealth and influence of the Church are enormous, a state of affairs due to the prescience of Tekla Haimanot, to whom reference has already been made. This remarkable man is supposed to have negotiated the restoration of the Solomonean line after three hundred years of deposition, and his modest price seems to have been a perpetual grant to the Church of one-third of the country. As a result the extent of the Church lands is tremendous: not only do monasteries, convents, and churches cover the country but great areas belong to them, and the revenues accruing therefrom are utilized to maintain an almost unbelievable number of monks, priests, and *debtera*. The numbers of these people were given to me by Abyssinians as over a million—this is of course absurd—but I was assured on good authority that over a quarter of the male population are included in these categories of parasites. And parasites they are, for they serve no useful purpose and exist on the taxes raised from the people working on the land: they do no work themselves and are even exempted from military service. They are on the whole ignorant and illiterate, for while some of them can read, very few indeed can write.

793 792 Monks are not supposed to marry: priests are allowed to marry once, and in fact do so: *debtera* are free as laymen; but I do not think that the lives of many of them could profitably be held up as examples for the people to follow.

793 No examination and little or no preparation seem

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to be necessary for ordination: payment of moderate fees ranging up to $5 (about 10s. to-day) appears to be all that is required. In this direction matters do not seem to have progressed much since Bruce wrote in 1790 giving the following description of an ordination:

"A number of men and children present themselves at a distance, and there stand from humility, not daring to approach him. He then asks who they are, and they tell him they want to be deacons (*debtera*). On this with a small iron cross on his hands after making two or three signs, he blows with his mouth twice or thrice upon them, saying, 'Let them be deacons'. I saw once all the army of Begemder made deacons, just returned from shedding the blood of 10,000 men, thus drawn up in Aylo Meidan, and the Abouna standing at the Church of St. Raphael, about a quarter of a mile distant from them. With these mingled about 1000 women, who consequently, having part of the same blast and brandishment of the Cross, were as good deacons as the rest."

It is highly regrettable in the interests of Abyssinia that the priesthood, being what they are, should exercise so much power and influence. This is no doubt attributable to a variety of causes, to tradition, wealth, land ownership, and also to the fact that they (or some of them) are the only persons in the country who understand the ancient Geze language in which the Code of Law (the *Fetha Nagast*) and other similar works are written. This gives them a great "pull", and one result is that they are an indispensable adjunct to all the judges, who are very much in their hands.

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793 They have always been bitterly opposed to pro-
176 gress and to innovations, more so as regards changes in their own Church than as regards the introduction into the land of alien religions, strange to say. Thus for example a learned individual, a very religious layman whom I knew, had been accused by the priests of expounding the Gospels in a manner somewhat different to that generally accepted, and as a result he was imprisoned for three years. His views on the subject of his own Church were instructive!

793 On the other hand they are by no means so in-
609 tolerant to other religious beliefs and efforts in the country; they are not fanatical, and if left alone and not interfered with are not markedly anti-foreign. Individually I have always found them quite pleasant and friendly, and I am bound to say that Mr Wylde, who met a great many of them in various parts of the country, seemed vastly to prefer them to European missionaries. But as a body I think they are—to put it mildly—an unfortunate institution, and so far as their possessions are concerned, treatment on the lines adopted by our Henry VIII would seem to be overdue.

609 Moslems, Jews, and others practise their religion
795 in peace. I have seen religious processions of the followers of Islam on their feast days pass through the streets shouting and singing completely free from molestation, and on the occasion of my last visit I saw a mosque which was on the verge of completion being constructed in one of the principal streets of Addis Ababa.

It is rather remarkable that in spite of the bitter religious warfare in which they have been engaged for centuries Abyssinians should be so tolerant of their

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age-long enemies and should allow them to profess their faith openly as they do, when one considers the havoc wrought by Moslem invasions and Galla inroads.

Even the Falasha Jewish ironworkers in the north, who are doubly regarded with dislike and suspicion as being Jews and as being possessed of supernatural powers, are treated with tolerance, though avoided.

No doubt this happy result is contributed to so far as Moslems are concerned by the fact that in Abyssinia they do not appear to be strict or fanatical—in pleasing contrast to their behaviour elsewhere. Mr Wyman Bury tells a delightful story in exemplification of this latter frame of mind. A pilgrim to Mecca, a plump and prosperous Moslem merchant at Aden in ordinary life, was gazing from the deck of the ship in rapt enthusiasm at Jeddah, which against the sun-scorched country beyond looked like a stale bridecake on a dust-heap. "Oh, the sacred land," he crooned "the blessed land, where pigs and Christians cannot live."

The Abyssinians still have a church in Rome, a monastery in Jerusalem, and monasteries and Ethiopic texts were discovered in the Libyan desert by the German explorer Falls.

The Abyssinian Church endeavours to maintain friendly relations with the other Christian communities: interesting examples of this are the missions sent to the Pope by the Emperor Menelik in 1906 and by the late Empress in 1921. A mission was also in Jerusalem at the close of 1922 in connection with some ancient rights of the Abyssinian Church regarding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other holy places; under the Turkish régime these rights had been transferred to the

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Coptic community. The present Emperor himself visited Jerusalem recently.

Possibly owing to ignorance and lack of education, the Church does not make any missionary efforts of its own amongst its subject races of Moslems and pagans, and up to recent years it did not tolerate, or at all events welcome, such efforts on the part of others. This is perhaps hardly surprising, for much of the missionary enterprise known to the Abyssinians had mingled politics with religious efforts, and had interfered in matters which had better have been left alone.

The Jesuits were expelled in 1633, and some who would not go were killed. The Protestant missionaries were expelled in 1838. Theodore can hardly have been said to have welcomed missionaries, though so far from expelling them he chained them up and would not let them go. King John expelled them again in 1886, and Menelik barely tolerated them, although a French mission has been established continuously in Tigré for a good many years.

But quite recently more missionaries have been allowed to start operations, especially in the Galla districts, and the Americans are particularly to the fore in this work in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. In addition, there is a French mission at Harrar and a convent at Addis Ababa, mainly educational and non-proselytizing, and a Swedish mission at the latter town of a similar character.

So far I do not think there is much trace of success by any of these institutions, but on the other hand there is evidence to shew (and my impressions are confirmed by American, Swedish, and French writers) that Islam, as in other parts of Africa, is making progress among

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the subject races in the country, both pagan and christianized Gallas reverting to the faith of Mahomet in appreciable numbers. As is well known, practically every Moslem immigrant is a missioner, and I think this is a real danger to the peace and stability of the country. 191

It would be a remarkable happening if the ancient Abyssinian Church that has resisted attacks on its faith of so violent a character for so many years should succumb to the "peaceful penetration" of Moslem teaching at this stage of its history.

Such an event is not however likely to occur in the immediate future, for their religion seems sufficiently strongly implanted to hold its own among the Abyssinians, and even to sway the national policy. For example, it was the late Emperor Lej Yasu's leanings to Islam, rather than his other manifold failings, that caused his downfall in 1916. He was undoubtedly popular with the rank and file of the army and with a certain section of the people, but when the national institution was in danger concerted action drove him from power.

But in all essentials, in constitution and in doctrines, the National Church of Abyssinia remains to-day as it has so often been described in the past—unchanged, unprogressive, reactionary; such a position cannot be retained for ever in a modern world, and sooner or later, if it persists in its present attitude, it must fall—with what results none can foretell.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE NATIONAL CHURCH AND RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA (*continued*)

346 771 BRUCE wrote that there was no country in the world where there were so many churches, and I have seen an estimate which I should think was well under the mark—of 3000 for Shoa, 1100 for Gojam, and 2600 for the districts of Gondar and Axum. For even small villages have two or three churches each, and it is a popular axiom that he who has erected a church has atoned for every sin. And to each of this legion of churches are attached many priests who live in remarkably simple—to put it mildly—accommodation in the precincts.

346 The buildings themselves are quite unpretentious, being small circular erections built of the stone that abounds everywhere in the country, covered with pointed thatched roofs surmounted by a cross on the points of which ostrich eggs are generally impaled. The Abyssinians show a considerable measure of reverence [788] to their churches, outwardly at all event. I have frequently seen men of importance stop their retinue when passing the church, dismount, and kiss the earth.

The principal modern church in Abyssinia is that of St. George, the patron saint of Abyssinia, at Addis Ababa. It is a stone-built edifice, octagonal in shape, surmounted by a large central dome; it is of no particular style of architecture, though it approximates to the Greek, and externally it is not very pleasing to

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the eye. Its beauty was not increased by the addition of a corrugated iron annexe for the purpose of seating some of the foreign guests at the Emperor's coronation.

The Abouna was good enough to arrange for us to visit the church, and we were received with ceremony by a number of priests, who were exceedingly kind and enabled us to make a thorough inspection, and even allowed us to take some photographs (which unfortunately, owing to the bad light, did not come out). They showed us everything with great enthusiasm and begged us to return "when a great feast was in progress". The building consists of three portions, a sort of outer gallery, an inner court, and finally the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, an inner chamber in the centre of the building in which rests the *Tabot* or representative of the Ark of the Covenant to which only the priests are allowed access.

The priests threw open the doors of the Holy Place for us to see in; it contained a kind of altar where the Sacraments are kept, and was surrounded by priests in very gorgeous vestments, burning incense and holding big crosses and crucifixes.

In one of the galleries a service was proceeding. Two priests were beating with their hands very big drums made of wood and hide; many others were shaking their curious little brass cymbals; and all were chanting, swaying their bodies, and slowly waving their praying-sticks. The time was really good, and the chant was rhythmic and tuneful, and not at all unmelodious.

The galleries were profusely decorated with huge life-size paintings depicting mainly scenes from the Scriptures, scenes from the life of Christ, the miracles, etc.; one dreadfully realistic picture of the Massacre

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of the Innocents was very striking. There was also a portrait of the Emperor Menelik, and of other noted characters in Abyssinian history; the likenesses of royal and other famous persons are frequently to be found on the walls or among the possessions of the principal churches.

In this connection an amusing incident is told by Stern. King Sehala Selassie had been given by Captain Harris' mission to the Court of Shoa, a portrait of Queen Victoria. This had been carefully guarded for many years amongst his treasures until his death, some time after which his successor, King Haile Malekot, presented it to the principal church at Ankober where the people used to flock on grand festivities to worship it as the representation of the Virgin Mary!

The *Tabot*, to which reference has been made, is the object of much veneration and has to be blessed or consecrated prior to being used in the particular church to which it is allocated. In one case the priest in charge of the church had committed a murder, and the *Tabot* had to be sent up to Addis to be reconsecrated before it could be used again.

The most prominent features of the practice of their religion are the fasts, feasts, and pageants; and each of these is sufficiently remarkable. A very large part of the year—about 150 days—falls under the category of fast or feast, and both are strictly observed. During their fasts they are forbidden not only meat, but also butter and milk and eggs, and it is really surprising to see to what an extent this rigid abstinence is followed, especially as the fasting periods are lengthy, that prior to Easter lasting forty days.

For a day or so immediately prior to the main feast,

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that is, at the end of a long period of fasting, they eat nothing at all, and so far do they carry this rule that sometimes one or two of our older servants have become so weak that they have had to go home and remain in bed, so exhausted were they.

On Wednesdays and Fridays they eat no meat, and wherever they are or whatever they are doing they adhere firmly to this rule. I was immensely struck by this when on trek; for example, one day we had bought an ox for our men and on Thursday they had had a great raw meat banquet. The next day being Friday they would not touch an atom of the quantities of raw meat hung round the camp, though they had had a long and tiring march and had nothing else to eat. One of the men, who was really ill, would not drink a drop of the fresh milk we had prescribed for him, though he was excessively weak and could not retain anything else.

Their feasts are observed just as whole-heartedly, and obviously with more enthusiasm, inasmuch as much eating and drinking and no work are the order of the day. Their main feasts are New Year, the Feast of the Cross or *Maskal*, *Temkat* (Epiphany), and Easter.

Their New Year's Day, the 1st Maskaram, falls on the 11th September (or the 12th in the European year preceding our Leap year) and is a great feast, and of course a general holiday, the religious side of which is strongly marked, the Empress and the Court attending the Church of St. George in state.

No work is done, and there is much eating, an oasis of plenty in the desert of fasting which starts again on the day after New Year's Day, and continues until the end of the month. Bands of grown-up people and groups of children wander round serenading the differ-

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196 527 ent houses, and although their intentions are doubtless of the best, the sounds they produce leave much to be desired from the point of view of harmony.

At the end of September is held the Feast of *Maskal*. There are three separate functions during the week in this connection, firstly the Dance of the Priests, 21st September, then the Dance of the Cross, 27th September, which includes a fantasia in which thousands of mounted troops take part, and finally the great *Gebbar* at which 17,000 to 18,000 men are fed (28th September).

On the day of the Dance of the Cross, after dinner we could see from our verandah the whole country for miles in every direction dotted with bonfires—a wonderful sight. Every Abyssinian must light something on this night, and they seemed to have done it pretty thoroughly; even high up in the mountains far away one could see the little points of light everywhere.

The Feast of the *Maskal* itself, which took place on the next day, is mainly remarkable for the great banquet; this I have described elsewhere, and though it is held on a religious festival the religious nature of it is less apparent.

196 *Temkat* (18th, 19th, and 20th January) is perhaps the most beautiful and remarkable of their various pageants, and I will accordingly endeavour to give some idea of this ceremony, unique as it probably is.

It is difficult in mere words to do justice to the really wonderful pageantry attendant on these religious festivals. Their historical significance alone is worthy of the pen of a Gibbon, for they are probably some 3000 years old in some of their features, and half-

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closing one's eyes it is possible to imagine the picture before one to be that of David, his priests, and his courtiers dancing before the ark, as the priests in their centuries-old vestments sway and swing before the modern representation of the Ark of the Covenant. And the colouring—the gorgeous medley of crimson and purple and yellow and green cloaks of the priests, their gold and silver croziers, crowns, and censers, the soft thrumming of the huge old drums, the feathery spirals of sweet-smelling incense curling lazily up into the air—all framed in a grand setting of green trees and running water, while above out of a brilliant blue sky the blazing African sun sparkles and glitters on all the medley of gold and silver and colour below, and—strange contrast—farther off, on the rifles of the thousand watching troops and their loose white toga-like *chammas*.

Especially do these considerations apply to the second day of *Temkat*, the blessing of the waters. On the first day the *Tabot* is borne from the Church of St. George in the midst of an immense procession of chiefs, priests, soldiers, banner-bearers, and musicians, through the town to the spot by the river which has been selected for the ensuing day's ceremony. The procession itself is sufficiently remarkable, and the inhabitants of the city crowd the roads to watch the brilliant stream of colour flow past, their shrill, tremulous "*el-el-to*" sounding to our ears a strange substitute for the cheers of a crowd in our own countries.

The procession winds its way through the town and beyond it to the river, and there tents are pitched, the *Tabot* is deposited within one of them, priests take up their quarters in others, soldiery in yet others, and with

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thousands of Abyssinians spend the night on the spot in readiness for the morning's function, which, commencing soon after daybreak (between 6 and 6.30), lasts well on to noon.

The spot seemed to have been chosen so as to lend additional enchantment to the ceremony. The river shrunken to a stream now in the middle of the dry season flowed smoothly over huge rocks and boulders round a curve, on between high banks sloping for several hundreds of yards upwards and away. Part of the stream had been dammed so as to form a pool just by a natural platform of grass and trees on the very edge of the waters, and here the principal actors were grouped, whilst above and around them thousands and thousands of spectators in rank after rank seemed but to act as a conductor to focus the eye on to the scene being enacted below. Here was Ras Tafari in his robes of state under a magnificent gold-fringed umbrella; here were the great officers of State with their velvet and silk cloaks, their silken shirts, and their great curved gold-scabbarded swords. And here were the priests dazzling one's eyes by the brilliance of their apparel and their accessories.

Standing a little way up the river-bank amid a small knot of Europeans lost in the sea of Abyssinians, it was almost hypnotizing to watch the scene. The drums beaten softly with the palms of the hands accompanied the low chanting of the priests and the rhythmical waving of their praying-sticks, while the fumes from the incense burners crept upwards to mingle with the almost mysterious mistiness of the early morning sunlight.

The water was eventually blessed, and some of it

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in a great gold dish carried to the Ras, who was sprinkled with it—rebaptized in fact—with many rites and much ceremony. Other notables were similarly honoured, and then water was thrown over the nearest of the waiting thousands. Those beyond surged forward to receive their share, and the pressure of the immense multitude must have been enormous, but their orderliness was no less remarkable, and no untoward incidents occurred.

With some further chanting the first portion of the ceremony came to an end, and the scene was changed to the great open plain between the town and the Foreign Legations, which is used as review ground, polo field, and racecourse. In solemn procession, ruler, courtiers, priests, and soldiers wended their way up from the banks of the little stream, up through rocky paths and grassy slopes towards the centre of the plain, whilst thousands and thousands of the people poured in a great stream all round them to take their share in the further pageantry. On our sure-footed little ponies we were swept along in the moving masses, all cheery and good tempered, dressed in their clean white *chammas*, which had been washed for the occasion in the river the day before. With the help of a *balderabba* we were able to take a short cut to the scene of the next step in the proceedings, and seated on chairs round beautifully coloured Persian and Indian rugs in front of a silk-lined tent which sheltered the throne from the fast warming rays of the sun, we watched amid the waiting multitudes the arrival of the royal procession and of fresh throngs, not the least remarkable members of which were a mounted band of wild-looking men clothed in scarlet robes and playing strange instru-

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796 ments, whilst their shaggy little ponies curveted and plunged like mad things.

Dressed in his magnificent Abyssinian robes, carrying a modern rifle, and mounted on a wonderfully caparisoned black mule, Ras Tafari rode slowly up to the tent and took his seat on the throne surrounded by hundreds of gorgeously clad notables, and facing what was perhaps the most striking contingent of all, the priests, ranged on three sides of a square in front of the throne. Those on the opposite side of the square were all in white; those on the right and left wore robes of such dazzling colouring that in the sun's bright rays it almost hurt one's eyes to look at them. Red, blue, green, orange, purple, every imaginable colour, thickly covered with heavy gold and silver embroideries, and gold ornaments and head-dresses. And as if this orgy of colour were not enough, servants held scores of gaudy coloured gold-embroidered and much befringed and tasselled umbrellas over them.

796 778 534 Many of the priests carried magnificent crosses of gold and silver, others their long silver or ivory-handled praying-sticks, whilst some held various musical bell-like instruments, and about half a dozen managed large drums—things about three feet high made of silver with copper bands. Particularly striking were the dresses of ten young boys bearing golden crowns, symbolical of the ten commandments; while the *Tabots* brought from the neighbouring churches were very gorgeously bedecked. It was a wonderful and barbaric sight.

796 535 And then the Dance of the Priests began. Low chanting without music at first, followed by slow graceful movements of all their hundreds of arms in fine

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time to the rhythm, then the little bell cymbals joined in, and finally the big drums. 796 535

All this time the long lines of priests were advancing and retiring, turning this way and that, their bodies swaying to the music. The time got quicker and quicker, others joined in, their movements became accentuated and their voices rose to a climax; then quite suddenly sound and movement ceased and the long lines were quite still.

After this, passages were read from enormous silver-covered Bibles, and with a final boom of the drums it was all over—a morning's journey back through the centuries, probably unique in the world in its character. 796

The Abyssinian Easter falls a week later than our own and is the occasion of great feasting; much rifle firing takes place the night before (or used to two years ago when ammunition was more plentiful), and much eating and drinking, on the day itself. And I am bound to say they must need it, for they have been fasting for forty days, and for the two previous days have eaten nothing at all. 796 527

Bands of priests visit the principal houses, soliciting alms, and I find the following description of one of these visits in my diary:

"Soon after breakfast a party of about five priests accompanied by attendants came up the drive, stationed themselves in front of the house, and began to sing and ring bells to wish us a prosperous Easter. Some of the priests wore their gorgeous vestments, and all had brilliant green or red silk parasols fringed with gold braid. We sent them out a small offering, which appeared to please them very much.

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196 527 "Then they blessed a lot of long grass they had, and gave it to us and we distributed it amongst the staff. Every servant there tied his piece of grass tightly round his head and wore it all day—they all seemed highly delighted."

111 But in spite of their strict observance of feasts and their pride in the fact of their being Christians, I cannot really think that they could in any sense of the word be described as a really religious people, their lives being in no way a reflection of their theoretical beliefs. Their religion is overlaid with a thick layer of superstition, some of which is merely curious, but some apt to have dangerous results. Thus they wear their charms and amulets suspended round their necks by a silken cord (never leather, which is used by Mohammedans for this purpose); they have a strong belief in the power of the "evil eye"; they will not look at a person eating, they will not start on journeys on certain days, and they believe that certain houses are inhabited by evil spirits and will not live in them.

181 We came across some curious examples of this latter superstition. Two important Abyssinian nobles had built in their grounds quite nice stone and mortar houses in the European style. These houses were lying empty, and their owners were living in native built *tukuls*, for the reason that their tame priests had told them that evil would befall them if they moved into their new residences.

Another and more serious example was that of a chief who was very ill with pneumonia. He was just getting over it when in the middle of one night his priest told him that he had had a vision to the effect that if he

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did not move at once into his other house some miles away he would die. So on a bitterly cold night the poor old gentleman was removed to his other place, a course of action which, needless to say, resulted in his death. 187

They still believe in the efficacy of writing the sick person's name on a certain kind of tree; and one of our friends told me that his own "boy" had done this when he (my friend) was ill, and attributed his recovery entirely to this cause. Another European who was very ill was cured (so said his "boy") by the latter obtaining from a native priest a piece of paper upon which the sick man's name was written. The "boy" had actually paid the priest the (for him) very large sum of three dollars for the paper. 155

And yet another example that came to my notice was that of a "boy" in the employ of a friend of mine who was suffering from lung trouble and was being attended, quite successfully, by a European doctor. As the "boy" did not think he was getting well fast enough he called in his priest, who advised him to swallow a cupful of petrol! Needless to say, the result was death.

So that in point of fact the Abyssinian priest does not appear to differ very much from the South African witch-doctor, and indeed of the two I should be inclined to give pride of place to the latter, so far as medical practice is concerned at all events.

[pp. 198–end have not been processed for the files.–Analyst]